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ABSTRACT

The shrinking labor market, tightening economy, falling enrollments, and declining national standards for education have had an impact on cooperative education programs. Those working in the field of cooperative education should become familiar with the report entitled "The Unfinished Agenda," which was vocational education's response to "A Nation at Risk." As the report makes clear, cooperative education has a vital role to play in providing the field-based learning that is so grossly underutilized in vocational education at present. Cooperative education is currently being challenged by corporate classrooms. If cooperative education is to meet this challenge, teacher-coordinators must solicit employer involvement to ensure that the vocational programs in which they are involved are preparing people to fit the available jobs in their area. Efforts to improve existing cooperation, coordination, and communication as well as development of partnerships with advisory councils are essential in order to develop strategies to cope with technological advancement. Because the overall goal of cooperative education is training rather than pay, care should be taken to keep students from focusing on the economic benefits of cooperative education as opposed to the opportunities derived from the training and basic skills portions of the program. (MN)

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"COOPERATIVE EDUCATION: FROM THE CRYSTAL BALL"

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) was founded in 1904 and chartered by an Act of Congress in 1907 to combat the widespread exploitation of young children in the fields, mines, mills and sweatshops. The photographs of NCLC staff member Lewis Hine stand today as a reminder of both the Committee's historic past and the shame of child labor.

National needs changed through the middle part of this century: by the 1950s it was clear that child labor abuses had decreased dramatically, but many young people were growing up with no preparation for the adult world of work. Their lack of job skills and professional behavior patterns excluded many from the labor force, placing a terrible burden on them, their families and on the nation's social welfare systems. NCLC's current program evolved to help ease this difficult transition from school to work and to promote equal educational opportunities for all.

The National Child Labor Committee is the nation's only private, nonprofit, voluntary organization which devotes a full program to the critical problems of youth unemployment and to the related fields of child labor and the education of migrant farmworker's children.

NCLC creates and expands education, training and job opportunities for youth, thereby protecting our national investment in the future. Toward this end, NCLC performs a broad spectrum of services for community organizations, private and public agencies, corporations, and for young people themselves.

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COOPERATIVE EDUCATION: FROM THE CRYSTAL BALL

What does the future hold for Cooperative Education? This question is being asked by many in view of the pending issues facing education in general, including vocational education. Current issues such as the shrinking labor market, tightening economy, declining enrollments and national standards for education have an impact on cooperative education programs.

National Reforms

The current resergence in education began in 1981 when former Education Commissioner T. H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Two years later, their report called A Nation At Risk, made recommendations significantly equal to when the Russians put sputnik in space and America found itself behind another rapidly developing country.

Why was the National Commission created in the first place? Overwhelming concerns at the time were 1) the declining public perception of education, and 2) the declining test scores of college-bound seniors.

Recommendations from the report were aimed at achieving excellence in our public schools and creating a society with an appetite to learn. Most of the recommendations pertained to five areas: 1) content of the basics, 2) standards and expectations, 3) learning time, 4) teaching, and 5) leadership.

Reaction to the Excellence in Education report was met differently among states. Some states took the recommendations and started making changes immediately. Others have studied the report, set up legislative changes and tried to understand what federal involvement was going to be required, and where the funds for implementing the recommendations would come from.

One of the main criticisms of the "Nation at Risk" report came from vocational educators. They felt that vocational education was not treated fairly as it was almost overshadowed with the recommendations for the back to basics movement. The American Vocational Association voiced its concern with the report that it's focus was on college-bound only. They said "It will assure a prominent place in generating new knowledge and Nobel Prizes, but does not give direction and leadership for improving the quality of secondary education in terms of upgrading the skills of the American work force." (Education USA, 1983, p. 284)

Vocational Education's Response: The Unfinished Agenda

This study was the vocational education response to The Nation At Risk. The National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education was organized in 1984. The charge was to examine the role and function of secondary vocational education. The Commission was needed to fill the gap left by other education commissions in the interest of achieving a more balanced perspective on secondary school reform.

The Unfinished Agenda was a comprehensive study of vocational education. The report covers the rationale for secondary vocational education, the promise of vocational education as an accountable education process, any current challenges which have to be overcome and recommendations for meeting and achieving those challenges.

As cooperative educators, you should each have a personal copy of The Unfinished Agenda just for what it says on Pages 22 and 28.

"Cooperative vocational education, a form of field based learning, has been one of the most successful aspects of vocational education. The distinguishing characteristics of Cooperative Vocational Education are that the program is jointly planned, structured, and supervised. Further, it involves a written agreement between the school, employer and student that outlines the planned learning experiences. Cooperative Vocational Education programs have high job placement records, and both students and employers express more satisfaction with this approach to field based learning than any other."
(Lotto, 1984, p. 22)

The Unfinished Agenda specifically recommends field-based learning as a part of secondary vocational education programs. The report indicates, "field-based learning is grossly underutilized. Therefore, we recommend that supervised, field-based learning experiences be made available to all secondary students. Cooperative Education must be a "capstone" element in all vocational education programs." (Lotto, 1984, p. 28)

Continued Support for Cooperative Education

A national report was recently released and may have an even more significant impact on cooperative education than The Unfinished Agenda. The study, Investing In Our Children - Business In Our Schools, took approximately three years to complete and cost one million dollars. It was done by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee on Economic Development. The Committee on Economic Development is an independent research and educational organization of over 200 business executives and educators. It is non-profit, non-partisan, and non-political. Its purpose is to propose policies that will help to bring about steady economic growth, high employment, and reasonably stable prices, increase productivity and living standards, provide greater and more equal opportunity for every citizen, and improve the quality of life for all.

The members of the Research and Policy Committee are the very top executives of most of the major corporations in America, from Exxon to Procter & Gamble, CBS, TRW, U.S. Steel, IBM, American Can, etc. They can be, and are, extremely influential.

In brief, this study calls for a complete overhaul of what is now called vocational education with a clear identification of what is vocational education. The summary on vocational education states: "The term vocational education should be limited to those programs specifically designed to prepare students to enter a particular field upon graduation. All other forms of non-academic instruction should be identified by a different term to avoid confusing them with programs that impart specific job skills. We recommend that before any student is allowed to enter occupationally specific training, he or she should be required to demonstrate an adequate level of academic achievement. All vocational education majors should be expected to complete a core academic curriculum in addition to their occupationally specific training. The area vocational centers, with centralized occupationally specific training, show much promise and should be expanded where possible. Those vocational high schools and vocational programs in comprehensive high schools which exist to "warehouse" students who are not performing adequately in academic subjects should be closed. We recommend limited trial programs to test the use of contracting to private suppliers for vocational education services in public schools." (Commission on Economic Development, 1985, p. 8)

In addition, the report specifically urges greater use of cooperative education programs which combines basic education with part-time work experiences. The study recommends that businesses participate in cooperative education programs.

As you can see, utilizing these last two national reports may effectively influence local governing boards to take another look at the impact of utilizing cooperative vocational education at the secondary level.

Challenges From Corporate Classrooms

If the challenges from all of the National reports are not enough, try the concern of some businesses that say "If schools can't educate, we'll do it ourselves" (Carnegie Foundation, 1984). That hits you right where it hurts--in the bread basket.

However, they aren't joking--corporations spend about 30 billion dollars a year on formal training programs for their employees and 180 billion dollars for informal on-the-job training. These costs were calculated by the American Society for Training and Development.

Companies started "corporate classrooms" with these goals in mind:

1) To introduce new employees or managers to the objectives of the business,
2) To provide rapid and accurate information on technological changes,
3) To expand opportunities for minority and disadvantaged groups, thereby complying with both legal and social responsibilities, and
4) To build a spirit of comradery.

To meet this challenge of corporate classrooms, cooperative educators can concentrate on some very basic suggestions. The first is to get to know business and industry representatives in your area and get them involved through advisory councils or other committees. Open two-way communication channels with them so current needs and curriculum changes can be tied more closely to local business needs. Basically, get to know them and offer them the opportunity for input.

Secondly, invite the business and industry representatives to visit the classrooms and shops of your vocational programs. Get them to the schools so that they can see what equipment and instructor materials you have, or don't have to work with.

Lastly, ask them for their assistance. Don't use this opportunity for "show and tell", rather ask them to contribute toward improving and strengthening your cooperative education programs in specific ways.

Thus, a partnership will be formed for long term growth, and the image of your cooperative education program will become more positive.

Economic Development and Cooperative Education

Many states, regions, and communities are promoting economic development. Starting new businesses and strengthening present ones are two top priorities.

My belief is the cooperative education coordinator places a vital role in a community's economic development. Who is more knowledgable about hiring needs within a community? Who is more tuned-in to where potential jobs may be found? Who is more aware of how the current vocational education programs prepare people to fit the available jobs in the area? And who can better represent education on a local chamber of commerce industrial committee than the cooperative education teacher-coordinator?

Employer Involvement

The willingness of employers to be involved in cooperative education programs is crucial to the future. In 1981, research showed that only 22 percent of all manufacturers in this country were not willing to be involved in cooperative education programs (Nunez & Russell, 1981). Of those 78 percent of the manufacturers who were involved with cooperative education, only 7 percent indicated that the company did not benefit from training cooperative education students.

Why then, with so many companies directly involved in cooperative education, do not more of them participate more actively? It may be because there are some conflicts between the interest of the employer and those of the individual student. Employers want workers who will perform specific tasks in their companies as efficiently as possible and who will not transfer their skills to competitors for more pay. However, the cooperative education coordinator can actively alleviate these conflicts by opening up better communication between the employer and the cooperative education student-learner. Trust and confidentiality are still basic attributes to any job whether it be through cooperative education or other work.

Coordination, Cooperation and Communication

Under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, vocational educators are encouraged to cooperate with other service providers of employment training to avoid duplication. Thus, it is imperative that cooperative education coordinators take the lead in contacting local and private industry councils under the Job Training Partnership Act and see first-hand where coordination could be achieved.

JTPA primarily serves economically disadvantaged individuals. One way cooperative education programs could cooperate with JTPA is to contract with them to place and supervise a certain number of students and to provide related instruction of employability skills.

Another area that should be coordinated with is apprenticeship programs. Contact should be made with the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training so that students desiring apprenticeable occupations could get credit toward journeyman status by utilizing the cooperative education program. Apprenticeship is mentioned 15 times in the Perkins Vocational Education Act, and it operates similarly to cooperative education. Thus, it is suggested that cooperative education and apprenticeship communicate to provide those students a year around activity of achieving their career goals and apprenticeable occupations.

Technological Change

Almost all economic indicators suggest that the remaining years of the 20th century will be a period of rapid change. Efforts to increase the competitiveness of American products and international markets and the widespread application of computers, production processes and communications should result in unpresidented rates of technological change. These changes will affect the skills needed in the labor force and the training that should be provided for these skills. Cooperative education will have a role in meeting the skill requirements of technological change and providing for the retraining of the labor force.

The overall impact of technological change is on the labor force. The development of new technologies and their adoption by business and industry will have a definite affect. With technological changes occurring in telecommunications, computer applications, and advanced manufacturing technology, production processes and service delivery systems are achieving higher productivity, greater efficiency, and lower costs. (McCaslin, 1984)

However, any approaches to educational changes as a result of high technology should begin with an advisory council. Business and industries that are making the change to high technology will require workers to hold specific skills. Their input is important to the effectiveness and success of any vocational education program. Cooperative education is still the best way for employers to train new workers utilizing on-the-job training.

Labor Force

Vocational and cooperative educators must adapt to the demographic changes that are happening in the population which will affect our labor force of the future. There will most definitely be fewer individuals entering the labor market in the next ten years and women will continue to represent a bigger percentage of that labor market.

The major source of job openings will be replacement of workers in existing jobs. Service industries will be the main source of employment increases. High technology will grow faster, however, will not employ any larger than 6-10 percent of the total work force. (McCaslin, 1984).

These labor force projections will have an overall impact on our cooperative education programs. First, there will be fewer students available for placement. Secondly, we will have to strive to place cooperative education students in more specialized jobs rather than just entry-level ones that could be eliminated by technological change in the future. Thirdly, the skills that cooperative education students will have to possess must be transferable to make workers more productive and flexible on behalf of the employer. Lastly, cooperative educators will have to work more specifically with students that have some handicapped or are from a racial/ethnic minority group. (McCaslin, 1984)

Implications For The Future

The future of cooperative education depends directly on the quality, the motivation and the strong self-image of the teacher-coordinator. As long as teachers develop an interest in working with business and industry, trying to solve their training needs, cooperative education has a good future. This is not to suggest that the immediate future will be easy for cooperative education. As has been discussed, declining enrollments, technological changes, administrative resistance, and coordination with other service providers will impact on our programs.

As these changes occur, it will be up to cooperative educators to adopt new strategies into their programs. Try them, test them, and then either adopt or disregard them. This will be the name of the survival game.

In laying out what the trends for cooperative education will be in the future, I have separated them into applicable areas for cooperative education such as students, the employers, and the teacher-coordinators. Before presenting the trends, I will identify some of the issues that are contributing to what the projected trends are to be. All of the trends that you will learn about today are not listed in any order of priority. They will be something to look at in your future planning for cooperative education, but it will be up to your own identification with these trends for you determine your priorities.

Student-Related Issues

The issues contributing to Cooperative Education trends for students lend themselves to the integrity of Cooperative Education, and specific skill preparation. Other issues that contribute to the foreseeable trends impacting on students of Cooperative Education are increased graduation requirements and effective time management.

The overall goal of cooperative education is training rather than pay. The earnings which students receive and their economic impact sometimes get prioritized ahead of the opportunities derived from the training. This reversal of importance impacts on the quality of the program. The quality of cooperative education must rely on the skill preparation needed for making a smooth transition from school to work and beyond. It is the training and development of employability competencies by students that leads to better career decisions which in turn is reflected in the success stories.

However, as indicated before, A Nation At Risk suggested increased graduation requirements in the academic areas which will impact on the limited time students have available for training and related instruction through cooperative education. The recommendations for four years of English, three

years of math and science, two years of foreign language, does not leave much time for occupational preparation through vocational education at the secondary level. Thus, the issue of effective time management by cooperative education students is really important. If the opportunity for flexible school and training schedules is not available, then cooperative education faces a future of declining enrollments.

The central purpose of Cooperative Education is the development of occupational competencies, using employment in a real-life job as a source of learning. The success of the program depends on the total cooperative relationship between the school, the business/industrial sector, and agencies of a community.

Employer-Related Issues

Employer-related issues in cooperative education include: Getting employers involved in reinforcing the validity of training plans, evaluation, and "time on task".

Cooperative education exists because employers are willing to provide quality paid training experiences. However, many times this cooperative arrangement is taken for granted and sometimes overlooked by the teacher-coordinator. Communication with employers leads to involvement. If employer involvement is not achieved, then the future of Cooperative Education is on borrowed time. Employers are the "backbone" of Cooperative Education and without their involvement, the posture will degenerate.

Short and long range plans must be developed to get employers involved. Typical involvement has come through advisory councils, but there are specific areas in the future where we need input from our source of existence.

Employers need to be involved in new ways including: 1) The impact of high-technology on cooperative education training positions and 2)"time-on-task".

It is true that the labor force has changed because of high-technology. Since schools are struggling with acquiring high-technology equipment, employers must become advocates of using cooperative education to train and retrain individuals on this sophisticated equipment. If cooperative education students don't have the necessary skills to use high-technology equipment, then we must begin immediately to implement curricular changes to see that these basic requirements are implemented into our technical related instruction.

Time-on-task involves recording what a student does and then calculating the percentage of time spent on task and off task.

Thus, "time on task" is a form of evaluation for Cooperative Education. Successful programs are discussed in terms of how many students are placed at training stations, how satisfied employers are, how many students are hired permanently after graduation, and so on. Although there are pressures to meet these objectives, these seldom relate to the major objectives of the cooperative education program. Cooperative education is intended to be educational. The training station is meant to help individuals prepare for employment by providing training. Therefore, the amount of learning time related to technical skills, basic skills, and employability skills at the training station is an appropriate and important part of the overall program evaluation.

It is not easy to measure learning at a training station. The two obvious sources of information, the student and the employer, may make vague and general in statements. They may overstate or understate the learning that is taking place. The employers may be very pleased with the students' proficiency and uniformally positive in their evaluations, but not have the time to observe the student's time-on-task training.

An evaluation is no better than the information upon which it is based. One effective way to gather information about cooperative education is through systematic observation at training stations. The information gathered should be as objective as possible, taking note of the specific tasks in which the student is engaged. Time-on-task observations, coupled with other information gained through direct observation, is a procedure for gathering this kind of information for the evaluation of individual training stations and student progress on the job. We must convince employers that the training time also contributes to productivity of the business.

Teacher-Coordinator Related Issues

A cooperative education teacher-coordinator works in a demanding profession: out on the road, in offices, shops, and stores; back to the classroom; individual conferences with students and parents; related classes that require more individualized instruction than most classes in school; being available at any time day or night; getting ready for new students; developing new training stations; coordinating with businesses and industries; doing follow-up reports and more reports. This kind of work is not for everyone. Frankly, it is a demanding program to operate. Without an effective teacher-coordinator, the cooperative education program could crumble. (Lloyd, 1981).

For cooperative education to continue and remain strong within education, there must be a continued assurance of quality to meet the desires of students and the demands of business and industry. The emphasis must be on quality. The following are some typical program strengths that must be maintained.

1) The teacher-coordinator must ensure job matching. The students interest, apptitude, and abilities must fit beyond the job training.

2) Teacher-coordinators are responsible for on-the-job supervision and coordination with business and industry. Effective utilization of coordination time must be accounted for. In the absence of on-the-job coordination and supervision, there can be no true school/work linkage.

3) Realistic and measurable training plans must be developed and carried out. The training station/sponsor should be capable of rotating the student-learners through multiple facets of a job experience and not simply the performance of one job task multiple times.

4) Strict attention and involvement should be given to the local advisory council. Are they informed about the cooperative education component of vocational education? "Lip" service is not enough - good advisory councils can be an asset to Cooperative Education.

5) Individualized instruction and counseling must be incorporated into cooperative education to meet the specific job requirements that constantly change as do employer expectations of workers. Teacher-coordinators must be a friend of the guidance counselor to maintain credability of the goals of cooperative education.

FUTURE PROGRAMMATIC CHANGES: A Look Into The Crystal Ball

1. Educational institutions will be in the business of creating jobs. Schools will set up small businesses to provide community services such as child care, lawn maintenance, gas stations, and specialty shops. Schools will also purchase, contract, or buy into franchises such as fast food, clothing, and others.

   The jobs these businesses create will be staffed by students who will get on-the-job training. Our present teacher-coordinators will probably provide the overall supervision and/or management.

2. School systems will require cooperative work experience of all students, and not all will be paid. Some students will shadow and others will render community services without pay, but all will be under the supervision of a teacher-coordinator for both safety and accountability reasons.

3. Today's teacher-coordinator will be reclassified to that of a teacher-trainer or coordinator-trainer or some facsimile thereof. These redefined educators may conduct seminars for employers on such topics as human resource development, quality circles, etc. As an important key for increasing productivity and job motivation, every worker will have an opportunity for personal growth and education personnel will play a big part in providing this information.

4. Records management for cooperative education programs will be completed and maintained by utilizing microcomputers. Students well become responsible for their own records and providing the teacher-coordinator with accountable printouts.

5. Teacher-coordinators will continue to be employed by school districts, but housed full-time at the larger training stations. Coordinators will provide related instruction, supervision and even train students at the training stations. Adult student-workers will be integrated into the place of business by using the cooperative education method during probation periods.

6. Secondary cooperative education programs will expand to the equivalent of two-year programs. One year will be solely devoted to entrepreneurship and the student learning how to operate his or her own business. The second year will be the actual start-up phase of the business, utilizing the expertise of the teacher-coordinator.

7. Cooperative education will expand to year-round programs. Employees and students will agree to this as time and graduation requirements mandate no other alternative.

8. Gifted students will become more interested in cooperative education programs. Curriculum will have to change to accommodate their differientiated learning styles.
9. Articulation guidelines between secondary, postsecondary and higher education programs will be developed, field-tested and implemented utilizing a universally accepted competency-based format for evaluation.
10. Teacher-education programs will change dramatically to include satellite teleconferencing with two-way communication. Each secondary and postsecondary institution will have a satellite dish, interactive video disc, and microwave communication equipment to facilitate professional development. Businesses utilizing the latest technology in human resource development will become coordinated for preparation of cooperative education teacher-coordinators.

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